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**Agency and Empowerment in consumption in relation to a patriarchal bargain:
the case of Nigerian immigrant women in the UK**

1. Introduction

Migration movements, whether voluntary or imposed, are indicative of wider cultural and socio-economic changes that bring opportunities and implications for consumer markets and our understanding of them. The scale is global. In 2013, 232 million immigrants lived in countries other than where they were born (United Nations, 2015). Within these numbers, women represent 51%, and most of these women migrate as a dependant of another family member, e.g., as a wife or daughter (ibid.). For married women, migration poses particular changes in the activities, access to resources, and family roles previously shaped by gender traditions and structures from their former geographic and socio-cultural contexts. The gender-related changes are particularly dramatic for married women immigrants transitioning from patriarchal to egalitarian societies.

In this paper, we are concerned with the agency and empowerment of immigrant Nigerian women living in the UK as impacted by consumption within the context of their patriarchal bargain, and with attention to their personal, family and wider social lives. The patriarchal bargain itself does not represent a written agreement, but instead reflects the informal, day-to-day ways in which couples enact ‘power hierarchies created through historical, political, economic, geographic, kinship-based and other socially stratifying factors’ (Mahler and Pessar, 2001, pp. 445–446). Indeed, as we demonstrate in this research, in the transition from being a wife in a consanguine family in their country of origin of Nigeria, which they describe as patriarchal, to becoming one within a nuclear family in the UK, a society to which they attribute gender

equality, Nigerian immigrant women alter their ways of thinking and consuming, with implications to their agency and empowerment.

By examining the impacts of immigrant Nigerian women's consumption on agency and empowerment in relation to their patriarchal bargain, we extend previous research on immigrants that has tended to focus on their consumption adaptations between their lives in their home and residential countries. For example, Oswald (1999) described how Haitians selectively combined elements of their previous culture in consumption even as they adapted those from the dominant culture in the USA, and Peñaloza (1994) explored how Mexican immigrants learned and adapted their consumption in living in US society in comparison to their lives in Mexico. Such studies emphasize immigrants' consumption patterns as a matter of people's engagements and exchanges with other people and with what is available in stores where they live. And yet, also important is research into the private and public lives of immigrant women within the internal space of the home, within their couples, and within the larger immigrant and resident communities. For example, Dona and Ferguson (2004) recognised that external factors, such as education and employment, encouraged Chinese and Japanese immigrant women to alter their gender roles at home. Notably, these insights were drawn from the immigrants' children's retrospection. While accessing the children's perspectives is valuable, this approach denied immigrant women the opportunity to provide their thoughts and actions in relation to their patriarchal bargains in these private and public cultural contexts.

By capturing immigrant women's voices, our paper contributes to understanding of the scope, rationale, and practices of immigrant women's agency and empowerment in consumption, as situated within the context of their patriarchal bargain. First, in studying immigrant women, we temper Kandiyoti's (1988) findings that acting within the contours of patriarchal bargains

maximises these women's security and life options. Instead, we show that the women restrict and curtail their consumption as well as their employment in the new country in ways that partially support the patriarchal system that privileges their husband. Second, we temper Kibria's (1990), Lim's (1997) and Dona and Ferguson's (2004) findings that immigrant women resign themselves to their husbands' authority. Specifically, we demonstrate how women indirectly and directly manifest agency in simple and common daily consumption activities in ways that empower them to adapt and even support the patriarchal bargain with their husbands at times. Finally, by soliciting and attending to immigrant women's voices, we qualify our findings in explaining how the women blend their interests with their love for their husbands and their appreciation for their cultural traditions and institutions in exerting agency and empowering themselves in relation to the patriarchal bargains with their husbands.

2. Literature review

Kandiyoti (1988, pp. 275/286) introduced the term patriarchal bargaining to describe the 'set rules and scripts regulating gender relations, to which both genders accommodate and acquiesce,' in emphasizing that women contest, redefine, and renegotiate their marital roles and relations to maximise security and optimise life options. Ultimately, she concluded that patriarchal bargains 'exert a powerful influence on the shaping of women's gendered subjectivity and determine the nature of their gender ideology in various contexts' (p. 286).

The origins of studies of patriarchal bargaining lie in the interdisciplinary field of feminist theory, where researchers tend to view gender and related feminine identities as a socio-cultural construction. In this sense, one is not born a woman, rather one is socialised into becoming one. A key theme in this work is examining the importance, role and behaviours within various

patriarchal social systems in which men predominately hold power and related authority over women and children. Reviewing this work, Kandiyoti (1988) argues that radical feminist studies liberally label as patriarchy almost any example of male domination, and that socialist feminists emphasize issues of social class within related capitalist economic arrangements. In complementing these perspectives, Kandiyoti (1988, p. 275) argues that feminist theory has failed to understand ‘the intimate inner workings of culturally and historically distinct arrangements between the genders’ that recreate patriarchal gender roles and relations.’ Thus, Kandiyoti focuses on women’s rationale for negotiating and compromising their position and relationships with men, and the impact of cultural values in supporting the patriarchal bargain.

Years later, Gibson-Graham (2006) emphasized inter-dependency within the patriarchal family patterns, observing that women are rarely fully aware of their power and the opportunities available to them. In particular she notes how women are ‘caught up in two places, experiencing the dissatisfactions and disappointments of what they know and habitually desire and the satisfactions and surprises of what is new, but hard to fully recognise and want’ (Gibson-Graham, 2006, p. 162). As such, women implicate themselves in patriarchal bargains from positions rife with potential and compromise, and situated within a male dominated cultural system.

Importantly, the patriarchal bargain is not a timeless or an immutable entity. Rather, it is situated within distinct social and historical formations, within which migration opens up new avenues for women to empower themselves. We build upon the previous work of several scholars in exploring agency and empowerment in consumption for immigrant women, with consideration to their patriarchal bargains. For Drydyk, empowerment is a process “of engaging with power, and it is empowering to the degree that people’s agency is thereby engaged to expand their well-being freedom in a durable way’ (2010, p. 13). Alsop, Bertelsen and Holland (2006) and Pires,

Stanton and Rita (2006) emphasize multidimensional aspects of empowerment, as interdependent cultural, economic, political, legal and social opportunities impact women's ability to behave in a manner allowing them to gain control over issues that concern them and to make their own choices. Narayan (2005) emphasizes choice as well, measuring women's empowerment as a function of: (i) the existence of choice; (ii) how an individual expresses their choice; and (iii) what achievements arise from expressing choice. Further, Drydyk (2010) distinguishes between agency and empowerment, though acknowledging that the two concepts are related. Agency represents 'the degree to which a person is autonomously involved in their own activities and group activities in which they participate' (Drydyk, 2010, p. 13). Conversely, empowerment refers to the particular conditions and capabilities a person has to engage in specific actions. Thus, in building upon this work, we sought to evaluate agency and empowerment for immigrant Nigerian women within the context of their patriarchal bargain by examining the women's relationship with their husbands and their achievements and consequences in consumption, and with attention to the relation between agency and empowerment in consumption specifically.

Complicating the picture somewhat for immigrant couples are the different gender roles and expectations in Nigeria and in the UK with respect to consumption. To illustrate, a husband permitting his wife to carry out consumption may not necessarily increase her agency nor foster her empowerment. Agency requires that she act in accord with her interests *as she defines them*. In turn, agentic action fosters the conditions in which she empowers herself.

We distinguish further between empowerment and agency in reviewing two studies. First, Agarwal (1997) illustrated how South Asian women exert agency and empower themselves through consumption that is made possible by their employment. Specifically, these women undertook 'survival strategies' including hiding from their husbands their employment earnings,

and purchasing and consuming products for themselves, which provided them an increased sense of independence. The capacity to act, together with the agency in the actions, and the sense of independence such action provided, were the means by which women empowered themselves. However, while identifying these strategies and discussing their implications are valuable contributions (Agarwal 1997), we seek to extend this work by addressing the rationale, conflicts and emotional consequences the women experienced with their husbands regarding their patriarchal bargains.

Second, Kibria's (1990) study of immigrant Vietnamese women in the USA also offers insight into immigrant women's empowerment. The women had requested that their husbands undertake household duties. Such agentic actions, unimaginable prior to the couple's migration, challenged the gender roles characterizing their patriarchal bargains. The husbands' response was to reject the wives' requests. In response to their husbands' rejection and wanting to resolve the ensuing marital disputes, the women established support groups with other women from their community. The women empowered themselves in the groups, reinforcing their respective actions and offering advice and mediation regarding the disputes. In building on Kibria's (1990) work we sift through women's and men's stories of immigration, their patriarchal bargains, and consumption.

Women's capacity to gain control over issues that concern them and to act independently from their husbands is partially determined by the gender inequalities constituting their patriarchal bargains. These inequalities are prescribed in socio-cultural definitions of gender roles and behavioural expectations appropriate to men and women (O'Neil, 1981). Within Nigerian society patriarchal bargains are such that women are expected to defer to their husbands and rely on them to generate income. In return, women take responsibility for childcare, household cleaning and food preparation, with limited involvement in food, education, and health expenditures, which

otherwise are the purview of men (Angel-Urdinola and Wodon, 2010; Asiyanbola, 2005; British Council, 2012; Omadjohwoefe, 2011). Further qualities noted for Nigerian women who challenge these gender inequalities include a higher level of education, where the couple live, the employment status of the couple, advancing age, and the husband's willingness to accept change (Angel-Urdinola and Wodon, 2010). However, these changes appear limited in the domain of consumption (British Council, 2012; Omadjohwoefe, 2011).

For immigrant women, the cultural spaces of the family home, ethnic community, and resident society present opportunities and constraints to express their agency and challenge their patriarchal bargain, as Kibria (1990) noted. In another example regarding home life, Lim (1997) noted that immigrant Korean women and their husbands in the USA both emphasized the women's responsibility for household duties. When the women asked their husbands to help them with cooking, food purchases and cleaning, the husbands' refused, asserting Korean cultural values and expectations for dutiful wives to maintain the home. In a similar study Dona and Ferguson (2004) noted that both Chinese and Japanese immigrant women living in the USA continued to undertake household chores and to maintain their husbands' culturally derived position as head of the family. These studies qualify the conditions of choice that immigrant women experience, in noting that husbands' dominance curtailed the women's ability to exert agency and to empower themselves. In addition, most women lacked the support groups Kibria (1990) observed.

De Haas and Fokkema's (2010) research with Moroccan immigrant women living in the Netherlands also shows them dutifully, albeit reluctantly performing household activities. This research challenges previous accounts (ibid) depicting immigrant couples as having assimilated coherent plans and strategies, sharing power, and reaching consensual decisions. Instead, these

authors show that immigrant women living in a society that values equality become more aware of the gender inequalities within their patriarchal bargains. Further, such awareness is a factor in their resistance to their husbands' requests to return to live in their country of birth, as the women interpreted such returns to unravel the agency and empowerment they had gained by reinforcing their pre-migration patriarchal bargains. However, it is possible that immigrants attribute an idealized egalitarianism to resident couples. In his ethnographic study, Miller (2005) noted the tendency among British white women to sacrifice their own needs in privileging the desires of their husbands and family in shopping. Cast within the privacy of the home, such sacrifices may not be evident to immigrant women or men.

Regarding Nigerian culture in particular, Angel-Urdinola and Wodon (2010) observed that exposure to Western cultural values of gender equality left gender roles relatively unchanged among Nigerian women immigrants at home. Earlier, in their study of African immigrants in Britain, Elam, Chinouya, and the Joint Health Survey (2000) noted that women's social skills and employment increased their empowerment in relation to men. However, in both studies, immigrant women's use of resources and expressions of agency did not necessarily result in husbands forgoing their patriarchal dominance. Such work is consistent with Zelizer (1989), who noted that immigrant women's earnings do not automatically increase their agency within their household, as husbands continue to assert a dominant position in the couple.

Thus, social institutions appear to both support and constrain women in expressing agency. Further, while immigrant women may internalize the egalitarian ideals that they attribute to resident cultures, there is some indication that they continue variations of the patriarchal bargain with their husbands. To recapitulate, our first research question explores how agency manifests in consumption for immigrant women. Second, we explore the extent to which immigrant women

empower themselves to reflect upon and challenge gender roles constituting the patriarchal bargain in the course of their consumption. Finally, we examine the relation between agency and empowerment in consumption for these women.

3. Methodology

Our research uses phenomenological interviews in examining the consumption discourses and experiences of immigrant Nigerian women in Britain in relation to their patriarchal bargain. We chose Nigerian immigrants living in Britain for a number of reasons. First, Nigerian culture contrasts with British culture in gender roles and relations. Second, post-colonial political relations between Nigeria and Britain are such that pre- and post-imperial links to Britain and political unrest led many middle-class and university-educated Nigerians to seek British citizenship in the 1970s and 1980s. Finally, there is a substantial Nigerian population in Britain; 191,000 Nigerian immigrants live there, and 78% of these people live in London (Office for National Statistics, 2013).

Research informants consist of 10 first-generation Nigerian married couples, 10 husbands and 10 wives, living in London and Manchester. This number exceeds the ‘suggested minimum of eight for generating cultural themes and categories’ (McCracken, 1988, p. 17). Regarding their profile, informants’ immigration to Britain ranged from the 1970s and 1980s (the majority of the informants) through to early 2000 (one participant). Further, the majority of the male Nigerian informants migrated first, and the women joined their husbands in the UK shortly thereafter.

One of the authors, who identifies herself as a second-generation black female Nigerian, and who does not speak a Nigerian language, conducted the interviews in English on a sequential basis. Interviews ranged from 90 to 180 minutes. First, she interviewed the wife and husband

together about their immigrant experience, life in Britain, and consumption, and then recorded, transcribed and analysed the interviews. Subsequently, the first two authors interviewed the wives apart from their husbands, covering similar topics and seeking clarification on responses from the first interview. In the second interview we sought detail regarding consumption experiences at home and outside the home, including experiences with family and with Nigerian and British friends and communities.

In analysing the interviews, we combined Blood and Wolfe's (1960) classic 'final say' approach with Moisander and Valtonen's (2006) insights regarding cultural texts and talk. Specifically, Blood and Wolfe examined gender inequalities in couples with attention to who tends to make and implement decisions regarding particular consumption objects and activities. In following Moisander and Valtonen, we gave special attention to the differences in responses and posturing by the women in the first interviews with their husbands as compared to the second interviews without them. We noted that responses were more convivial in the first interviews and contrasted with the more woman-centric responses apparent in the second interviews. To elaborate, during the first interviews, we noted that the wives generally demonstrated support and agreement with their husbands, especially with regard to their consumption decisions. Wives' responses were factual, precise and unemotional, while husbands tended to emphasize their roles in providing financial resources to support the family. In the second set of interviews wives demonstrated greater animation and freedom of expression in contradicting the husbands' earlier responses at times.

Also in following Moisander and Valtonen (2006), in our final iteration of analysis we critically analysed the transcripts and codes such as 'consumption necessity,' 'asserting power' and 'conformity' with attention to informants' sociodemographic characteristics, and we revisited

earlier comparisons between the two sets of interviews, with concerted attention to our cultural backgrounds and experiences as authors. As one author is a second-generation black Nigerian woman living in Britain and the others are a white British man and an American Latina woman, our different experiences and interpretations allowed for deeper analyses of these data. In particular, we discussed the women's interpretation of their consumption and we triangulated analysis of their accounts and rationale as forms of agency and empowerment within the context of their patriarchal bargain within the home, in the local Nigerian community, and in British public contexts, as Nigerian women living in Britain.

4. Findings

In presenting our findings we begin with the origins and contours of the patriarchal bargain for these women. We then detail their consumption experiences, delineating categories which subsequently serve as the foundation for further discussion of agency and for implications regarding empowerment. The categories include indirect and direct private and public consumption, through solo action and in alliances with others.

(i) *Situating consumption within the post-migration patriarchal bargain*

All informants, women and men, expressed desires to continue to honour their patriarchal bargains, tracing them to Nigerian cultural and Christian religious beliefs learnt at an early age regarding what constituted a good wife and husband in relation to each other and to family. Bob, an accountant, succinctly summarized the bargain in his interview, '*A woman's role is to look after her husband and her children, while a man's role is to provide for his family. He should have the resources to support his family.*'

In the first set of interviews the men emphasized their Nigerian identity, the financial resources they had garnered, and the consumption decisions they had made. In contrast, women spoke of their attachments to Nigerian culture in terms of their responsibilities to their husbands and children. Jess, a midwife, put it this way, *“Being African women, you know, we have responsibilities. We can’t behave anyhow, especially when you are outside [the home]. We have to respect ourselves. You know, it’s not easy, very stressful, but that [is] our culture. Sometimes I ask myself why do I do this and that, but it’s my culture. I have to honour my culture.”*

Informants reflected on their decisions to migrate. For husbands, migration offered employment opportunities to better provide for their family. Wives listed job opportunities as well, and some mentioned equal opportunity. For example, Margaret highlighted possible career progression, while Jess and Emily anticipated more autonomous gender roles than what was allowed with the surveillance of extended family and community in Nigeria. Emily, an administrator, stated, *“I like the fact that this country provides women with opportunities, yes, it’s true. There are so many doors that are open to women in this country, which is very refreshing, compared to Nigeria.”* Supporting their accounts was a rather idealized view of life in Britain as a country of opportunity, respect, and equality that some dated to Britain’s colonial rule of Nigeria.

Yet for many informants, immigration experiences did not deliver these pre-migration fantasies. Several informants recalled their initial shock in experiencing distinct gender treatment and a lack of good manners, including disrespect to parents and elders. The testimony of Jane, a care worker, epitomized many informants’ observations, *‘They [British whites] do not place importance on the family, which is bad. I see women that let their children behave anyhow, women divorcing their husbands, and lack of respect.’* Accompanying these experiences was a

lack of job opportunities. Many men and women informants experienced significant periods of unemployment and underemployment, often working in jobs they were over-qualified for.

Compounding career difficulties were experiences of racism. Informants listed verbal abuse, discrimination at work and in shops, and a few had even suffered physical attacks. Jess contrasted the surface friendliness at work with her exclusion from white-only friendship groups there, *‘Some of them [British whites] can be two-faced, you know. They can be all friendly, friendly in your face but later they change.’* As a result, most women female informants socialized primarily with other Nigerians living in Britain. Only three informants, Angela, Emily and Karen reported having made white British friends.

The lack of career opportunities and racist experiences thwarted their patriarchal bargains as well. In response to husbands’ un-and under-employment and family financial pressures, some wives sought work. Of the working wives, many wives recognized that working posed difficulties to their husbands and contradicted their end of the bargain. In her testimony below, Karen reflects on the difficulty her work posed to her and to her husband, and how she tried to deal with the judgment she felt from another member of the Nigerian community in the UK,

“It was very difficult ... knowing my husband. I know he feels bad about me working the way I did when we first came to Britain ... for me it was uncomfortable leaving the children with him. I wasn’t brought up in that way, but what could I do? I had to work. My husband was not working, so he supported us in that way... There was one day that I was at my family friend’s house ... I told her that my husband was looking after the children. She looked at me in disgust, as though I committed a crime! I just said to myself, ‘Do I care what this woman thinks? We’re doing the best for this family.’

Other wives compromised their job opportunities or did not seek employment, at times in abiding to their husband's request. For example, Emma reluctantly closed her own commercial business to look after their children per her husband's request. Similarly, Shirley commented that she had complied with her husband's request that she train as a midwife instead of a dressmaker. In the quote below, Jane explains her rationale to maintain her patriarchal bargain in not working,

You know, Nigerian men. Their pride is in their home and being able to provide for their family. Let me tell you, men like to feel like they are in control. You know sometimes you have to give them the opportunities to feel like this. It is not that I can't contribute now, but I must give him his respect. Let him be a man, let him look after the well-being of the house, while I look after the family, so that is how I behave. It is not that I cannot do all these things myself. After all, I'm here and want to contribute because I know the pressure that he is under.

In contrast to the employment difficulties and racism in British society informants reported, they credited the local Nigerian community in serving as a refuge sustaining them and reinforcing Nigerian traditional gender roles. According to informants, at community events and gatherings both men and women expressed disapproval of the gender equality they associated with British society. Further, such disapproval was cast upon those community members conforming to such British ways, as is evident in Jane's testimony above where she recalls receiving a 'look of disgust' from another Nigerian woman upon confiding that while she worked her husband cared for their children.

Even so, the contrast of job opportunities outside the home and the continued adherence to patriarchal gender roles at home produced conflicting feelings for many of these women. For

Emily, these contradictions set the conditions for calling into question her patriarchal bargain, a question she answered by invoking the Bible,

Sometimes I find myself asking the question, 'Ah, I'm a professional woman in Britain. I have all these skills, yet when I'm home I have to behave [in] a completely different way!' So you can see where frustration can set in for some people, but then I look at [my husband] and say, 'Well, in [the] Bible the Lord God said, "Thou should honour your husband"'. I have that constantly in my mind.

ii Consumption within the patriarchal bargain

Overall, in response to our questions regarding consumption, women and men indicated that a good Nigerian wife maintained the home, purchased food and prepared meals, and dutifully brought up the children to respect their father. In interviews both women and men directly and indirectly acknowledged that men maintained authority over types of food, dress, and even home furnishings, while women carried out such consumption. Further, women emphasized their husbands' competence with the financial affairs of their families, and their authority with electrical products, cars, and even home furnishings. When describing their consumption, Anna, Jess, Margaret and Nicola described buying clothing to enhance their femininity and please their husbands. Shirley mentioned purchasing clothes for her husband as an extension of herself, *'Well, I want my husband to look good ... He is a reflection on me.'*

Delving deeper into the consumption discourses and experiences in relation to the patriarchal bargains, we noted different levels of directness/discretion, private and public location, and with family members and members of the Nigerian community, both locally in the UK and in Nigeria. Indirect, private forms of consumption consisted of hiding, manipulation, and pacification at

home. Direct private consumption occurred primarily in the home as well. Indirect public consumption involved market situations and persons outside the local Nigerian community and in Nigeria; and direct public consumption took place in relation to the local Nigerian community.

Indirect private Consumption. In the second interviews the women revealed more of the complexity of their situations. For example, Jess and Shirley reported having hidden shoe purchases from their respective husbands, George and Oliver. Mary mentioned that she at times hid English food from her husband, Alan, because he insisted that she prepare only Nigerian food for them to eat, “*Sometimes what I do, don’t laugh... I secretly buy English food and pack it in the deep freezer, so maybe for lunch I’ll take it to work and eat it. [laughs] It’s just easier for me!*”

In other instances, women hid their purchases of electronics. As with food, both men and women informants considered electronics to fall within the domain of men. Fiona, Emily, and Jane used funds they had earned from their jobs to purchase high-cost electrical products for their children. Fiona purchased a laptop for her daughter, while Emily purchased a Nintendo game console for her son. In the excerpt below, Jane explains that she purchased a video game for their youngest son to compensate for the husband’s purchase of a computer for their eldest son.

There was a time when he [their youngest son] got so vexed with my husband, as he gave my eldest son his laptop for university. My son was not happy [and] it nearly became something serious. Well [laughs], don’t mention this to my husband, but later I bought him one of those computer games. They call it [pauses] a Nintendo. He deserved it anyway; he did well in his exams!

Despite their attempts to engage in such purchases for themselves in secret, the wives noted that their husbands eventually discovered some of their ‘secret’ purchases. In these instances, and in response to our follow-up questions, the women continued with their explanations to their husbands at the time on the grounds of marketing opportunities, such as a short-term price discount and impulse purchasing, and in relation to caring for their children.

Shirley noted that her husband’s reluctance to reveal his purchases encouraged her to do the same thing and not tell him, referring to the above example of shoes, *“You see, there are times when I do things that my husband is unaware of ... not all things have to be shared with my husband [laughs]. You’ve got to be smart, my dear. You see, when I’m buying things for myself, my husband doesn’t have to know! Does he tell me everything that he buys? No, so that is it.*

Other instances the women supplied in the second set of interviews we categorized as deliberate strategies of manipulation and pacification to achieve what they desired in consumption. Margaret and Jess explained to us how they drew upon Nigerian patriarchal values to manipulate their husbands, Geoff and George, to purchase the car brands they desired. To paraphrase Jess’ account, George initially expressed his interest in a Renault Espace. Then, instead of demonstrably asserting her preference for a Jeep Grand Cherokee, Jess warned him that a Renault Espace would undermine his standing within the Nigerian community, while the Jeep would uphold his position. Ultimately, Jess’s husband purchased a Jeep Grand Cherokee. In her words, *“So I said to him that a Jeep would be better...ah, he was complaining, it’s too expensive, this and that. Ah, you know us women. We buy our time very carefully [laughs and turns to us] ah, how can I go and drive that sort of car [Renault], me?! People would be saying, ‘Ah Jess, what kind of car be this?’ I thought, ‘Say you’re husband, be big man!’”* [1]

As noted earlier, food preparation is an especially highly charged area in Nigerian culture (British Council, 2012). Indeed, two husbands, Alan and Oliver, requested that their respective wives, Mary and Shirley, cook Nigerian food exclusively. In creatively meeting this aspect of their patriarchal bargains, a few of the women informants reported cooking food that was quick to prepare. Others gave reasons for not doing so. For example, Emily distinctly recalled using an exaggerated feminine voice in blaming the closed meat shop to pacify the disappointment of her husband, Peter, acting as a typical Niaja [ii] man when she ‘made the mistake’ of serving him spaghetti, *“I remember one time I made the mistake of serving him spaghetti [laughs]. Oh, I never heard the last of it; ah, he complained. My dear, I just packed the food and ate it myself. Typical Niaja man [laughs]. I mean, by the time I get back from work, I’m just too tired to cook, so I look for something quick to prepare. He complains and gets angry. You know men. But I don’t bother myself. I just serve what I can cook and say, ‘Honey, I’m sorry, the meat shop was closed today, so I couldn’t make soup today.’ You know I have to talk in a sweet voice [laughs].*

And what does your husband say?

He doesn’t say anything. He may complain, but he’ll eat. He has no choice in the matter [she laughs].

Direct private consumption. As mentioned previously, men and women informants made clear in the first set of interviews that a husband’s role as family provider extended beyond employment into particular forms of consumption. In addition, men described their wives’ compliance with their consumption demands as being shown respect. Conversely, in the second interviews, while readily acknowledging the importance of respecting their husband, several of the women reported instances of consumption that directly encroached upon their husbands’

domain. Examples included Jess paying a household bill, Shirley having the curtains repaired, Emily purchasing a TV, and Jess and Karen purchasing home furniture.

In the second set of interviews we further noted that the women typically provided rationale for their actions using language that implicitly or explicitly designated their and their husbands' acknowledgement of these acts as displeasing to the men and requiring an explanation. The explanations featured husbands' time constraints, wives' earnings, and considerations for children. Only a few women mentioned that their husband had demanded an explanation. For example, in the excerpt below Fiona, who worked as an administrator, explains how she drew upon her own earnings to replace a chair that one of their children broke while Wayne, her husband, was away. She acknowledges Wayne's dislike for the shop where she purchased the chairs and continues in mentioning its price promotion at the time, *"Well, I bought the chairs in the living room, yes. While my husband travelled, one of the chairs went bad. You know children; they like to jump and play. I don't know what happened. One of the seats went bad, so I went to one furniture shop and bought two chairs to replace the bad ones."*

What did your husband say?

He did not say anything really. He just asked where I got them from. I told him; he was not happy. He doesn't like the shop, but I was thinking to myself, 'Well, they were having a sale', and the price was good, so I bought [them] and they look nice.

In several instances, women and men described or intimated the wives' consumption as reasonable given the men's time constraints. That is, because wives had more free time, they were entitled to take on men's consumption roles. For example in the excerpt below, Jane explains that her husband, Andrew's, excessive work hours left him too exhausted to replace a

broken curtain rail. After a considerable period of waiting, she resolved the problem that he ‘should have done’:

There was a time that I had to replace one of the curtains in our room. Well, I couldn't wait for him, so I had to replace it myself. I just went to Homebase [iii] and got a new rail. I then called one friend I have that knows a builder, and that is how he came to fix the curtain rails. They are still there today!

So what did your husband think?

Well, what could he say? I couldn't wait, something that he should have done ... he hadn't done! So I had to do it myself. It did not matter what he thought [laughs].

The women mentioned children in their explanations as well. Emily noted that when her husband Peter confronted her about the new television, her response was that she was encouraged and supported by her children to make the purchase. The explanation involving the children appears to have appeased him. According to Emily, Peter's reaction was quiet resignation.

Indirect public consumption. In a few instances, husbands charged wives with carrying out a purchase. For example, Shirley explained the sequence of events when her husband had requested a particular brand of wood-working tools, and his reaction when she substituted a cheaper brand, “*His work tools he has ... for his hobby. They are so expensive! Wow, the amount that it costs is ridiculous. He wanted the expensive ones, but I didn't buy them. They were just too expensive, so I bought the cheaper [tools] to save money.*

What did he do when he found out?

Well, he was not impressed. In fact, he went back to Tesco^{iv} to return it; that thing caused an argument ... I didn't know how important the tools were! That day, all I did was take the refund, which was a gift voucher, and bought myself a pair of shoes.

Women's clothing was another contested area for the couples. For many of the men, racist experiences of British society had discouraged them from socializing outside the local Nigerian community and they requested that their wives refrain as well. Indeed, many women reported having compromised their social activities to comply with their husbands' wishes to not establish friendships or socialize outside the Nigerian community. There were exceptions. Emily claimed to invite her white friends to her home only when her husband was away. Karen's testimony was more disjointed. In her first interview she agreed that she complied with her husband, Howard's request that she wear the colorful Nigerian clothing. In her second interview, however, she recalled having purchased a Western-style dress and wearing it to the 40th birthday party of a white friend from work over his objection, *"I bought this lovely dress from Monsoon. Anyway, my husband saw what I was wearing and he said, 'Darling, are you wearing that?' I know what he was trying to say; he didn't like what I was wearing. As for me, I didn't bother myself and just continued with what I was wearing."*

In the most dramatic example, Margaret utilised British and Nigerian banks and lawyers to secretly purchase land and construct a house in the Nigerian city of Lagos without her husband knowing about it, and despite his wishes to build a second house in his ancestral village. She explains, *"We already had [a house in Nigeria]. Although it is in need of decoration, it is still there [in the ancestral village] ... I can't imagine the children wanting to stay there when they visit, so I just took it upon myself to start to develop my land, and, to be honest, it was the best decision that I have ever made. The house is wonderful."*

Her consumption required a secret savings account and hidden legal correspondence. She took full responsibility for her actions, and even planned to repeat it with her sister, *"Yes, actually"*

I have been discussing with my sister, and we want to invest in a few properties in Nigeria, the market is so good. But I have to keep that hush-hush for now [laughs].

Why?

Well, you see, my husband is really not into property investment, but I feel it would be an ideal way for us to have another external income when we go back to Nigeria.

Direct public consumption. Instances of women informants blatantly engaging in consumption in public that was counter to the Nigerian patriarchal bargain were rare. We mentioned already that both women and men associated Nigerian clothing with traditional gender roles and Western clothing with gender equality. In her second interview Margaret spoke of community pressure to conform in wearing Nigerian clothing and adhering to cultural customs, especially when her husband became president of their local Rumuokwurusi community,^v *“I had to behave like this, carry myself like that; it was tiring, too much of a stress. I wasn’t able to talk freely. My duty was to look well-to-do and support my husband. It just wasn’t me, but it was something that was expected of me. I [would] have to wear what my husband was wearing [Nigerian clothing].*

She then explained the time she wore an ‘elegant’ Western-style dress to a party within the Rumuokwurusi community in the UK, *“There was one time when I wanted to wear something really elegant. I knew my husband would be wearing traditional, but I said, ‘Ah, let me wear something different for a change.’ That day I went to Marks & Spencer^[vi] and bought a very elegant black dress. My husband did not know! [laughs]. The only time he saw it was when we were ready to go. He just looked at me; he couldn’t say anything! Ah, I just pretended that I did not see him; I just wore it to the event [laughs]. Funnily enough, since that day he has not mentioned anything about it!*

Solo and allied consumption patterns. Our last findings subsection distinguishes the consumption patterns of women informants by themselves and in alliance with others, both family members and friends, both in the private confines of their homes and in public. Alone, at home, women informants hid their consumption from their husbands. Further, the women aligned with their husbands privately in manipulating and pacifying them to carry out the consumption activities the women desired. Parents implicated their children in their patriarchal bargains as well. Men and women expressed the expectations that children be socialised to respect their father as the head of the family head and to conform to traditional gender roles. Women's public consumption stories related incidents in which they had encouraged and supported their children in purchasing clothes in ways that contradicted these roles. For example, Margaret would regularly take her children shopping. At times she used earnings from her job to pay for branded clothing that her husband commented on being either too expensive or not necessary. Conversely, Jane noted that her husband requested that their children always wear expensive, premium-branded clothing, regardless of its use for school or play. In the excerpt below she describes his anger that she had purchased cheaper brands, juxtaposing his pride with her priority for saving money, *"I think, like with most men, it's pride. Pride in a sense that he doesn't want to be seen as not providing for his family, but really I don't see it like that, as I just see it as a way of saving money."* Common in these two disparate vignettes is the way women carry out their interests in consumption apart from those of their husbands.

5. Discussion

In the discussion that follows, we elaborate the distinct threads of agency in immigrant couples' discourses regarding their consumption experiences and then proceed to unpack the

complex contours of empowerment. The paper closes with practical recommendations for marketing managers.

i. Agency.

In evaluating women's agency in these data, we revisited Drydyk's (2010) conceptualization emphasizing autonomous involvement in personal and group activities. For us, important in evaluating such agency is the women's interpretations of what they do and how they define their interests and desires, necessarily including their consideration to their couple. The contrasts between interviews done with the women and those done with them and their husbands, was as crucial as it was problematic in accessing these women's understandings and manifestations of their interests. It was crucial to see them apart from their husbands to yield a sense of their personal views. At the same time, we acknowledge that our presence was somewhat problematic in likely having an impact on what they said they did.

The findings proceed from the most limited forms of agency to those of moderate and greater magnitude. First, regarding indirect private consumption, we find some agency in *hiding*, as the women selectively develop their interests and manifest their desires. As when Shirley says, "Be smart," we noted that hiding does avoid confrontation, at least when it is successful.

We noted some agency in women's *manipulation* of their husbands as well. While this type of consumption activity keeps the patriarchal bargain intact, in that women express their interests and desires within the bounds of his interests, such manipulation does develop and at times accomplishes her desires. Jess's quote was insightful, to "bide our time carefully" in successfully convincing husband George to buy a Jeep.

In addition, the strategy of *pacifying* husbands yielded women some agency as well. Emily's excuses such as his time constraints and the closed meat shop entailed a softer form of expressing agency. The women disguised their interests, yet ultimately accomplished their desires.

Second, we noted more agency in direct private consumption. Women were taking on activities they and their husbands considered to fall in the husbands' domain. This included Jess paying the household bills, Jane repairing the curtains, and Emily buying a TV for the children. Importantly, such consumption activity took place within the domestic sphere of the home.

Third, the agency in indirect public consumption was both discrete and impressive. Both Jane and Margaret prioritized their interests at times over their husbands, Andrew and Geoff, in their consumption of clothing for their children, albeit in opposite ways. For Jane, it was in buying less expensive clothing than husband Andrew wished for, while for Margaret, the clothing was more expensive than what he preferred that she buy. In other instances, Karen exerted strong forms of agency in wearing western clothes and seeing her white friends, yet she did so when husband Howard was not around, thus minimizing a direct confrontation with him. Margaret exerted the most agency in buying a house and using a bank in secrecy from her husband Geoff, and was in the process of doing so again with her sister.

Finally, direct public consumption, while potentially the most agentic, ultimately was not so in practice. Margaret exerted much agency in wearing a stylish, black western dress to a local Nigerian community event in the UK. This was her husband's domain, as he operated in a leadership position in the group. Yet, such agency appears to have been limited. While he said nothing in response to her action, it was not something she mentioned having done again.

ii. Empowerment

In addressing the nature of empowerment for Nigerian women in these data, we found Narayan's (2005) three dimensions useful, yet requiring some qualifications. To recall, Narayan emphasized: (i) the existence of choice; (ii) how an individual expresses their choice; and (iii) the achievements that arise from expressing choice. Crucial for us in evaluating these women's empowerment included their understandings and interpretations of their capabilities to act, and of the consequences of those actions, with regard to their consideration of their patriarchal bargain. Our qualifications to this work feature the importance of goals and consequences of consumption activity in appreciating the multiple and at times contradictory conditions of married Nigerian women immigrants in the UK. While technically the women have choices, they express their desires partially in consumption, acting in their husband's interests as well as their own, with consideration to the couple in their activity. For these women, empowerment in consumption is only partly about them and partly about their husband and couple.

First, we noted some empowerment in the strategy of *hiding*. In demonstrating their capacity to develop and satisfy their own desires and tastes in consumption apart from their husbands, the women carved a separate place alongside their patriarchal bargain. Jess' and Shirley's shoe purchases and Mary shopping for food and hiding it in the freezer were good examples of this.

Second, we noted women's empowerment in a somewhat different form in *manipulation*, as the women accomplished their desires within context of patriarchal bargain. To be more specific, wives cajoled their husbands to carry out her interests, which worked both for her and for him in a 'win/win' arrangement for the couple, as she is voicing her interests in terms of his interests.

We noted greater forms of empowerment in the strategy of pacifying, in that the women acknowledged their patriarchal bargain, even as their actions transgressed it. As an example, Emily privileges her interests in not wanting to cook soup everyday, although she disguises them

in terms of her inability to buy the key ingredient, meat, since the shop was closed that day.

Husband Peter didn't get the soup he wanted, but at least she 'tried.'

Direct private consumption was most interesting, as the wives were engaging in activities that were the husbands' domains. Emily is paying bills and buying electronics, Jane is repairing curtains, buying children's clothes, and also buying electronics. Margaret is taking the children shopping for their clothes. Fiona is buying chairs and, like Jane, electronics, and Shirley is buying Oliver's tools. These consumption activities entail a partial, defacto alteration to the patriarchal bargain, as the wives make allowances for their actions in terms of his work-related time constraints. While these actions were somewhat suggestive of a new bargain, the husbands did not seem overly concerned. Andrew did object to the source of the curtains Jane furnished, and Wayne did not like the chairs Fiona bought, but both curtains and chairs remained in their respective houses. Only Peter returned items. Importantly, with the exception of Peter's tools, the items related to their homes, and so this consumption, while novel, is at the same time recognizable as an extension of the former patriarchal bargain from Nigeria. Ultimately, we find mixed empowerment in direct private consumption, as the wives are doing more 'work.'

We further noted valuable empowerment in indirect public consumption. It was a means of developing a public persona apart from husband and Nigerian culture for the women, and it sidestepped the patriarchal bargain initially and continually for some of them. Importantly, we noted integration for Emily is seeing her white friends and wearing western clothes at home in the UK, although she did so while husband Peter was away. In other instances Margaret engaged financially in building a house in Nigeria and was in the process of doing so again with her sister.

Finally, while we noted some empowerment in direct public consumption, it was tempered in the longer term. Margaret did wear a black western dress to a function of the Nigerian community

in the UK, but did so in a way that was too late for him to object, and she did not mention ever having done that again.

Regarding the consequences of these various forms of agency and empowerment, we noted very limited response on the part of the husbands. Few of the men said or did anything in response to women's actions, at least in the women's accounts to us. While perhaps this was a matter of what the women were willing to tell us, there are other reasons related to the men's constraints of time and money, the upper middle class stature of the couples, and their somewhat idealized understandings of the UK system based on partial contact with it. Overall, the Nigerian patriarchal bargains appear somewhat untenable in the UK as both women and men demonstrated novel roles and activities. In explaining further our findings, we emphasize that these women defined their interests partly on their own terms and in relation to their husbands and culture. While apparently conflicting, these are not distinct or mutually exclusive interests for the women, as they combined their interests with their love for their husbands and culture. Thus, we emphasise that gender role transitions are an important part of immigrant consumer acculturation, offering both opportunities and challenges for agency and empowerment for women within, and apart from, their patriarchal bargains with their husbands.

iii. Marketing Implications

The many adaptations of informant couples we have discussed in this work offer opportunities and challenges to marketers. Our recommendations to marketing managers emphasize first understanding and appreciating the importance of the patriarchal bargain in its varied and changing forms to the women, the men, and for their couples.

Though marketers may be tempted to support immigrant women's gender advancement and equality in marketing strategies, as doing so is consistent with UK gender traditions and values, an explicit strategy is unlikely to be successful. These women did not perceive their consumption to be acts of resistance to male domination or assertions of their increasing roles and associated power within the family, but rather as a means to advance the well-being of their couple and family. Thus, marketers should explicitly and implicitly support these women as active, competent consumers, as women, and as wives and family champions in depicting how they consume and make purchase decisions together with their husbands, and how they engage with the symbolic meanings of products and brands. In addition, retail employees' training should recognise the differing roles the wife undertakes when she is alone and with other women, as compared to when she is accompanied by her husband and family. Retail employees can make a huge difference in comfortably accommodating immigrant consumers by colluding, supporting and even subtly challenging traditional gender roles, as appropriate. Such actions and representations are likely to resonate deeply with women in serving as their allies in acculturation and in the ongoing adaptation of their patriarchal bargain, while recognising that, in various forms, the bargain remains intact for many.

Regarding the limitations of this research, we first note that the ten couples we interviewed were predominantly from the middle classes, with some representation among the working classes for the men. As such we qualify our findings and analyses in offering limited generalizability to all immigrant Nigerian married women living in the UK. Second, we acknowledge that while interviewing the women initially with their husbands and subsequently alone generated for us some sense of the women with and apart from their husbands, it is possible that our presence impacted the responses. It is also possible that conducting the interviews in

English possibly skewed the responses. At the same time, we suggest that the presence of a second generation Nigerian women helped enable a rapport that tempered these effects.

Many questions remain. Future research could focus particularly on how consumption impacts the marital relations between Nigerian immigrant women and men living in couples in the UK, as well as for immigrants from other nations living here and/or living in other nations. Another promising theme for future research is the role of children in parents' changing power relations. We welcome further research to explore the significance of existing ethnic relations on changing marital power relations in couples. Gender roles are among the most contentious aspects of immigrant–resident-ethnic-social relations. In particular, the historical, political, economic, geographic, kinship-based and other socially stratifying factors noted by Mahler and Pessar (2001) merit further exploration within couples, and between them and the resident ethnic subcultures, as well as with the local Nigerian community and that in Nigeria. Finally, longitudinal studies are particularly well-suited to documenting the changing nature of patriarchal bargains in the ways immigrant women and men adapt their immigrant families. Only by conducting further research over time that expressly features the intricate interactions and relations of immigrant couples, with attention to cultural traditions and wider social changes in both home and resident countries, will we appreciate how women constitute agency and empower themselves through consumption.

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Appendix 1: Female sample group profiles

Table 1: Demographic information of Nigerian informants living in Britain

Participants	Name	Age	Occupation	Married to:	Age	Occupation	Dependants
1	Jane	45	Care Worker	Andrew	49	Accountant	Yes
2	Shirley	51	Midwife	Oliver	64	Surgeon	Yes
3	Emily	49	Administrator	Peter	52	Businessman	Yes
4	Jess	36	Midwife	George	42	Train Driver	Yes
5	Emma	39	Nurse	Matt	44	Security Man	Yes
6	Anna	40	Police Officer	Bob	45	Accountant	Yes
7	Karen	38	Nursery Assistant	Howard	44	Security Man	Yes
8	Mary	51	Housing Officer	Alan	64	Semi-retired	Yes
9	Fiona	49	Administrator	Wayne	50	Lecturer	Yes
10	Margaret	55	Administrator	Geoff	61	Financial Director	Yes

Endnotes

- i Nigerian slang for Nigerian man.
- ii Pidgin English with Nigerian slang intimating that her husband act in accord with the patriarchal bargain.
- iii A British home-improvement retailer.
- iv Tesco is a large supermarket chain in the UK.
- v Fortnightly meeting held by individuals from Rumuokwurusi who now reside in Britain.
- vi A British department store chain.